

Faith Break 2 – Together in Thanksgiving

Transcript of the pre-event video

Zoom Meeting October 17, 2020

What is Eucharist? - Pastor Marlys Moen

As a child growing up in the Lutheran church in the 60's, we always referred to this sacrament as Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper. And, as a child, I knew I would not be receiving communion until I had been confirmed at about the age of 14, following two years of intense confirmation instruction. Confirmation Sunday was a huge rite of passage. It not only meant participating in your first communion, it also meant important things in some communities like: your first pair of high heels and nylons for girls and your first suit for boys, hidden, of course, underneath the white confirmation robe!

Communion was a serious event. Growing up in pietistic Lutheran circles meant taking seriously the injunction in 1 Corinthians 11:28 and 29: "Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves." In other words, you better be really, really sorry for your sins and display an appropriate demeanour of repentance as you went to communion. I remember hearing the story in one congregation where some people only went to communion once a year in order to maintain their membership, as required in the church's constitution. Otherwise, they were subject to scrutiny that went like this: "Who do they think they are going for communion?" or "Who do I think I am receiving communion?" This emphasis on repentance and worthiness led to such legalism and judgment in far too many congregations. They completely ignored the aspect of thanksgiving in Holy Communion which typically was celebrated only quarterly or perhaps monthly. Such emphasises certainly ignored much of Luther's own teachings! In fact, two of Lutheran confessional writings teach that "All communicants receive the body and blood of Christ, regardless of whether they are worthy or unworthy." (*A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions*, p. 192)

The *Worship Wordbook*, (p. 55-56) reflecting the Augsburg Confession, described the meaning and promise of the Eucharist in these ways:

- "1. The consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist grant to the communicant the gift of Christ's real presence, his true Body and Blood. This is the body born of the Virgin Mary and resurrected from the grave; this is the living Christ conveyed in, with, and under the bread and wine. Through the Holy Communion, Christ continues to offer and provide those gifts of forgiveness and salvation he offered and provided during his ministry on earth.
2. Though the celebration of the Eucharist, the Church obeys the mandate of Christ to remember him—his redemptive sacrifice and his victory over sin and death. More than a human effort to recall past events in Christ's life, Eucharistic remembrance (*anamnesis*) is an action of grace by God to make past events in salvation history present and operative now for the community of believers.
3. Through the promise of the Word of God and through the action of the Holy Spirit ...the true Body and Blood of Christ are made present at each celebration of the Holy communion. Through this presence Christ continues to nourish and guide the community of believers.

4. Whereas Baptism incorporates one into the body of Christ, the Church, the Eucharist sustains and maintains that mystical union.
5. The Eucharist is an eschatological feast, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet....
6. Holy Communion is a communion of saints, living and dead. It proclaims the unity of angels and archangels and all the company of heaven with the whole Church on earth, all assembled at the altar to offer thanksgiving to God for the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, who is the pattern and content of the Church's thanksgiving.
(end quote)

As one of my seminary professors pointed out: This notion of communion of saints is physically reflected in some of the old European churches and here on the prairies where the half circle of the altar rail is completed outside the church by the half circle in the cemetery.

With the liturgical renewal beginning in the 70's, spurred on by the outcomes from Vatican 2, Lutherans began to reclaim some of their original teachings and understandings of worship, including Holy Communion. The Eucharistic meal became a meal for all the baptized, not just the confirmed! Also reclaimed were the understandings of joy and thanksgiving – this is a foretaste of the feast to come. Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again. This is truly a meal for sinners – the words of institution remind us Christ commanded us to do this for the forgiveness of sins. The Lord's Supper is both a promise of Christ's presence and a testament of grace and forgiveness.

Eucharist is celebrated in a variety of ways in Lutheran congregations. Holy Communion is celebrated much more frequently, often every Sunday in many congregations. The notion of Eucharistic hospitality now means that options may include gluten-free wafers or grape juice in addition to regular bread and wine. Wine may be served in a chalice or individual glasses. Typically, Lutherans receive both bread and wine, although receiving in one kind only is still considered communion. You may see People coming to the altar rail to receive the communion elements, or people coming continuously to the front.. The pastor serves bread and lay communion assistants serve wine. All are welcome!

At this time we do not have complete agreement on the Eucharist so Lutherans and Roman Catholics are not in full communion. However, considering that more than 500 years ago, we parted ways in anger and violence, I take great comfort and hope in the strides made over more than fifty years of dialogue between our two denominations. For me, one of the greatest moves is the understanding that we have more in common than what separates us. For too many years, we allowed differences to keep us separated and antagonistic towards one another. I am glad to say that today we can now proclaim and live with joy and thanksgiving as we move even closer together as family in Christ: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, uniting us. Within our two judicatories, the BC Synod and the Archdiocese of Vancouver, we have continued our dialogues and joint worship since 2017. Thanks be to God! Individual Lutheran and Catholic congregations are also continuing their learning and growing together in Christ in communities like Coquitlam and New Westminster. Thanks be to God! And in our second Ecumenical Faith Break you too are invited to share your reflections and experiences of Eucharist and living together in Thanksgiving. Thanks be to God!